

USDA SPECIALTY CROP COMPETITIVE GRANT

ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF SPECIALTY CROPS IN VIRGINIA

Guidelines, Instructions and Application

Federal Fiscal Year 2008

Administered by

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

**P.O. Box 1163
Richmond, Virginia 23218**

**(804) 786-3501
(804) 371-2945
www.vdacs.virginia.gov**

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THE USDA SPECIALTY CROP COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Background

On December 21, 2004, the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) authorized the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide state assistance for specialty crops. In October of 2006, the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announced a Notice of Funds Availability Inviting Applications for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP).

In an effort to reach specialty crop initiatives throughout the state, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) established a competitive grant process for these funds. VDACS will be administering funds totaling \$123,565.74 for the development of Specialty Crop projects that will support and enhance the competitiveness of Specialty Crops in Virginia. VDACS will accept grant proposals with a value of up to \$25,000. Once all proposals are submitted to VDACS, each will be carefully reviewed and evaluated based on the criteria listed in this application. All VDACS-approved projects will then be developed into one grant submission to the USDA. Upon approval from USDA, VDACS will notify applicants (sub-grantees) of their status. No final awards to any sub-grantee will be made until a final grant award is made to VDACS (grantor) by USDA. Final approval is expected by April of 2009, but is subject to change.

Intent/Scope of Program: Research Projects Accepted for Funding

Definition of Specialty Crops:

Eligible Specialty Crops

Fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops (including floriculture) are eligible specialty crops.

Ineligible Commodities

Cotton and Cottonseed	Aquaculture	Sugar Beets
Feed Crops such as Barley, Corn, Hay, Oats, Sorghum Grain, Millet	Oil Crops such as Peanut, Soybean, Sunflower, Safflower, Rapeseed, Canola, Mustard Seed	Livestock and Dairy Products, Including Eggs
Flaxseed	Peanuts	Tobacco
Food Grains such as Rice, Rye, Wheat	Range Grasses	Turf
Sugarcane	Sod	

Examples of "enhancing the competitiveness" of specialty crops includes, but is not limited to: research, promotion, marketing, nutrition, trade enhancement, food safety, food security, plant health programs, education, "buy local" programs, increased consumption, increased innovation, improved efficiency and reduced costs of distribution systems, development of sustainable farming

systems, environmental concerns and conservation, product development, and developing cooperatives. Processed foods are eligible as long as they enhance the competitiveness of fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops (including floriculture). Aquaculture is not eligible under the Program.

Priorities for use of USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant Program grant funds will include, but not be limited to, the following activities:

- Assisting farmers in transitioning into specialty, high value agricultural initiatives that address the eligible specialty crops listed above
- Increasing net farm income for an industry or particular region through high value or value-added enterprises
- Finding new ways to add value to specialty agricultural products
- Finding new ways to market specialty agricultural products
- Pilot and demonstration programs in specialty agriculture that have the potential for transferability within rural Virginia

PART I: QUALIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Application Requirements

- The application must be typed. Complete this form by either typing the information on the sheet provided or by completing the form in Microsoft Word by downloading this document from our web site at www.vdacs.virginia.gov.
- Inquiries regarding the application process should be addressed to:
USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant Project Manager
Virginia Department of Agriculture Services
P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, Virginia 23218
(804) 786-5448
Melissa.Ball@VDACS.Virginia.gov
- Applications will be accepted via mail, electronic mail, express delivery or hand delivery to the VDACS office at 102 Governor Street, Room #326 in Richmond. Include at least one signed, unbound original, one copy and one electronic version (applications should not be permanently bound or submitted in a notebook). Applications sent electronically via e-mail must also submit one hard copy with original signatures. Send applications to:
 - Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23218.
 - Electronically to Melissa.Ball@VDACS.Virginia.gov
 - ***Applications must be received by 5:00 PM on Friday, October 24th, 2008 to be considered for this funding.***

Eligible Applicants

- Applications will be accepted from agricultural associations, industry / producer groups, community based organizations, and academia that seek to improve the competitiveness of specialty crops in Virginia.

Non-Eligible Applicants and Uses of Funds

Applications will **NOT** be accepted for any of the following:

- Any request for which 100% of the cost is expected to be borne by USDA Specialty Crop Grant funds.

- Any request for reimbursement of expenses for activities completed prior to submission and approval of the application.
- Requests to pay for essential government services normally paid for with general taxpayer funds, such as research equipment or faculty salaries.
- Requests that seek to replace operational funding for ongoing projects that have suffered losses of state or federal funding, or to supplant other local, state or federal funding.
- Staff support needed to implement the project.
- Any request to pay for “indirect costs” associated with a project
- Any request for reimbursement of travel expenses where the cost is over the State travel requirements.

Evaluation Criteria

Approval and scoring of applications will be based, in part, upon the following:

Specialty Agricultural Development Potential (up to 40 points)

- Needs Assessment and Market Opportunities (valid and clear appraisal of magnitude of specialty agriculture need or market opportunity to be addressed by a project)
- Potential Impact (project’s ability to add income and wealth to farmers, agribusinesses and organizations in Virginia from specialty agricultural products, markets or value-added opportunities)
- Conveyance & Visualization (potential ease with which the theoretical design can be implemented)
- Numbers of Farms/Farmers Served, Assisted, or Trained (increasing scale as project moves from achieving greater awareness/education of opportunities to highest points for measurable conversion of farms to specialty agriculture, products, and markets)
- Please note that for sub-grants to academia, those documenting the support of associations and industry will be favored

Technical Merit (up to 25 points)

- Thoroughness and Clarity of Request (assessment of needs and opportunities, budget documentation, qualified project management, etc.)
- Financial Feasibility and Project Readiness (identification of appropriate sources of funds, status/commitment of those funds, reasonable outline and timeframe of steps for project implementation)
- Matching Funds. Applications that include matching funds will receive higher consideration than requests that are based solely on Specialty Crop grant funds. Matching funds may include in-kind resources or direct cash contributions. While there is no required percentage of matching funds, any funds committed as matching funds must be spent concurrently with USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant funds (i.e. past expenditures will not be counted as match).

Significance to Long Term Sustainability of Virginia Agriculture (up to 35 points)

- Regional or Statewide Significance (documented philosophical support from a cross-sector of vested farms, agribusinesses or organizations within a multi-jurisdiction region, with increasing points for financial participation)
- Long Term Solutions (long-term, measurable and sustainable solutions to specialty agriculture needs or opportunities identified by the project)
- Knowledge Transfer – "User-friendly" (potential for transferability of methodology and technology throughout Virginia)

Application Review Process

Requests for funding will be reviewed by VDACS Division of Marketing staff and presented to the Commissioner of Agriculture, who will make final grant awards.

Term of Grant

Unless agreed to by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, funding for all projects will be granted for up to two years. All project leaders will be required to submit a nine month and eighteen month progress report. Additionally a final report is to be submitted no more than thirty days after the completion of the project. The expenditure of grant funds must occur in the fiscal year in which they are awarded.

Sub-grant recipients agree to participate in at least one VDACS sponsored event (i.e. educational conferences and seminars) designed to disseminate knowledge gained.

Award Administration

Acknowledgement of Support

An acknowledgement of the USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant Program must appear in any publication or any significant event based on this project. Terms should include "This project is supported in part by the USDA Specialty Agriculture Grant Program, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services."

Payment of Grant Funds

Upon final approval, all sub-grantees must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) stating that funds shall be used as described in the application. Funds are disbursed on a reimbursement basis and upon submission of a payment request form and adequate supporting documentation. Payments will be made within 30 days after receipt of properly completed reimbursement requests.

Reporting Requirements

Reporting requirements are project specific and based on the duration. By signing the Memorandum of Agreement the grantee agrees to accountability and reporting requirements, including:

- A nine-month, eighteen-month and two-year (comprehensive) summary of total project costs and total amounts expended to date.
- Reports must include the following:
 - Source of funds expended
 - Details on how the funds from the USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant were used
 - Objectives accomplished, based on original application for funds
 - Status of the project and estimated time and cost for completion
 - Report of any potential problems which will prevent timely completion of project

Failure to fulfill reporting requirements may be cause for withholding funding, withdrawal of funding or possible rejection of future proposals. All financial reports must be submitted no later than 30 days after the completion of the project.

Audit and Reports

Financial records, statistical records, supporting documents, and other records pertinent to this award shall be retained for a period of three years from submission of the Final Project Report. Records that relate to audits, appeals, litigation, or settlement of claims arising out of the performance of the project shall be retained until such audits, appeals, litigation, or claims have been disposed of. The VDACS Internal Audit Director and the Auditor of Public Accounts or any of their duly authorized representatives shall have access to any pertinent documents, books, papers, and records of the recipient organization to make audits, examinations, excerpts, and transcripts.

Site Visits

VDACS and the Auditor of Public accounts, through their authorized representatives, have the right, at all reasonable times, to make site visits to review project accomplishments and management control systems, and to provide such technical assistance as may be required.

Safeguarding Funds

In no case will USDA Specialty Crop Competitive Grant funds be commingled with the personal funds of, or be used for personal purposes by, any officer, employee, or agent of the recipient; nor will any of these funds be deposited in personal bank accounts for disbursement by personal check.

Changes in Project Leader or Partners

If any leader leaves the recipient organization or otherwise relinquishes control of the project, VDACS must be notified immediately. Transfer of the award to other organizations must be reviewed and approved by VDACS.

Withholding Payments

VDACS reserves the right, upon written notice, to withhold future payments after a specified date if the recipient fails to comply with the conditions of the award, including reporting requirements.

PART II: Instructions for Completing Application

Each proposal should include the following documents. Complete *all* information requested. Proposals that are incomplete and do not satisfy all the requirements are at risk of being disqualified and returned to the proposing organization without review. Each proposal must be in the following format with numbered pages:

I. Cover Page and Abstract:

Include the lead agency for administering the plan, along with an **abstract of 200 or fewer words** for the proposed project.

II. Project Purpose:

Clearly state the specific issue, problem, interest, or need to be addressed. Explain why your project is important and timely.

III. Potential Impact:

Discuss the number of people or operations affected, the intended beneficiaries of the project, and/or potential economic impact.

IV. Financial Feasibility:

Provide budget estimates for the total cost. Indicate what percentage of the budget covers administrative costs. Administrative costs should not exceed 10% of any proposed budget.

V. Expected Measurable Outcomes:

Describe at least two **discrete, quantifiable, and measurable outcomes** that directly and meaningfully support your project's purpose. The outcome measures must define an event or condition that is external to the project and that is of direct importance to the intended beneficiaries and/or the public. Examples of outcome measures may include per capita consumption, consumer awareness as a percent of target market reached, market penetration based on sales by geographic region, dollar value of exports, or web site hits.

VI. Goals:

Describe the overall goal(s) in one or two sentences for the project.

VII. Work Plan:

Explain briefly how each goal and measurable outcome will be accomplished for the project. Be clear about who will do the work. Include appropriate time lines. Expected measurable outcomes

may be long term that exceed the grant period. If so, provide a timeframe when long term outcome measure (part V) will be achieved.

VIII. Authorization:

By signing this Application, the Authorizing Agent is guaranteeing that the information contained in this Application is correct and verifiable. The Authorizing Agent is also affirming that the funds requested herein will be used for the specific purpose outlined in this Application and for no other purpose. (Attach a resolution of the governing body of the applicant organization, authorizing this person to submit the application in the name of the organization.)

ATTACHMENTS

IX. Biographical Sketches

- Provide a resume or biographical sketch of each person who has primary responsibility for developing and implementing the proposal.
- Information should clarify each person's project responsibilities, and highlight their qualifications.

X. Letters of Support

Attach any letters providing evidence of support for the project.

I. Application for USDA Specialty Agriculture Grant Cover Page

Project Title (No more than 50 characters)		
Name of Organization	Address of Organization	
Employer Identification Number		
PROPOSAL INFORMATION		
Requested Start Date: 6/1/2008	Anticipated End Date: 11/30/2009	
Requested Amount:	Total Project Cost:	
	PROJECT LEADER	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Full Name		
Title		
Organization		
Telephone Number		
Fax Number		
E-Mail Address		
Mailing Address		

Signature

Date

<p>Abstract (200 or fewer words)</p>	
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II: Project Purpose:

Clearly state the specific issue, problem, interest, or need to be addressed. Explain why your project is important and timely.

Project Title:	

III. Potential Impact

Discuss the number of people or operations affected, the intended beneficiaries of the project and/or the potential economic impact if such data are available and relevant to the project.

IV. Financial Feasibility:

Provide budget estimates for the total cost. Indicate what percentage of the budget covers administrative costs. Administrative costs should not exceed 10% of any proposed budget.

Proposed Project Budget

	Spec. Crop Funds	State	Federal	Local	Private	Other* (in-kind etc.)	Total
Personal Services (Salaries, Wages, Benefits)	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Contractual Services							
Supplies and Materials (pre-project information, workshop manuals, final reports, etc)							
Advertising/Promotions (Publication Costs / Documentation / Dissemination)							
Meeting Expenses							
Travel							
Other							
TOTAL COSTS:	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$

* Other/in-kind contributions must be described in the Budget Narrative.

Budget Narrative: Describe how these funds will be used, provide additional budget detail for distinct elements of the program and explain how the estimated expenditures were determined.

V. Expected Measurable Outcomes:

Describe at least two discrete, quantifiable, and measurable outcomes that directly and meaningfully support your project's purpose. The outcome measures must define an event or condition that is external to the project and that is of direct importance to the intended beneficiaries and/or/ the public. Examples of outcome measures may include per capita consumption, consumer awareness as a percent of target market reached, market penetration based on sales by geographic region, dollar value of exports, or web site hits.

VI. Goals

Describe the overall goal (s) in one or two sentences for the project.

VII. Work Plan:

Explain briefly how each goal and measurable outcome will be accomplished for the project. Be clear about who will do the work. Include appropriate time lines. Expected measurable outcomes may be long term that exceed the grant period. If so, provide a timeframe when long term outcome measure will be achieved.

VIII. Authorization:

By signing this Application, the Authorizing Agent is guaranteeing that the information contained in this Application is correct and verifiable. The Authorizing Agent is also affirming that the funds requested herein will be used for the specific purpose outlined in this Application and for no other purpose. (Attach a resolution of the governing body of the applicant organization, authorizing this person to submit the application in the name of the organization.)

Name of Requesting Entity: _____

Name of Authorizing Agent: _____

Title of Authorizing Agent: _____

Address of Authorizing Agent: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Signature of Authorizing Agent: _____

Date: _____

SUBMISSION ATTACHMENTS

IX. Biographical Sketches

Provide a Curriculum Vitae resume or other description of each project manager's qualifications. See Instructions for details.

X. Letters of Support

Attach letters providing evidence of support for the project.